

NEWS TRANSCRIPT

U. S. Forces Korea Press Conference

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Van Fleet Room, 8th Army HQ, Yongsan Army Garrison

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Good Morning and Happy New Year. I hope 2007 will bring joy and prosperity to both the Republic of Korea and the United States.

As I near the end of my first year of service in the Republic of Korea, I want to make a few observations. First, Korea is a great land, with a rich culture, a magnificent history, and with incredibly wonderful people. My wife Katie and I are blessed to have the opportunity to serve in this magnificent country -- a country that is a model for developing democracies all across the world. We are deeply honored and privileged. The Republic of Korea military leaders I have met and worked with are all, without question, among the most competent, capable and best trained in the world. These ROK military leaders are true warriors. The people of the Republic of Korea are very fortunate to have such superb professionals defending their nation. The future of this nation continues to be bright and promising and its security is in good hands.

My view of the ROK - US Alliance remains unchanged. Our Alliance is strong and enduring. We can make it stronger. The United States will remain a trusted and reliable ally as long as we are welcome and wanted in the Republic of Korea. The ROK-US Alliance will continue to be a vibrant and effective deterrent, as long as both our nations remain united in their resolve to ensure lasting peace and security and stability -- through strength, including continuation of the extended deterrence offered by the United States' nuclear umbrella, consistent with the mutual defense treaty. Given the highly provocative and totally unnecessary military actions this past year by north Korea, including unprecedented missile firings and the detonation of a nuclear weapon, Alliance readiness through strength has never been more important.

In United States Forces Korea, we are modernizing and improving our partnership with the Republic of Korea military. We want our transformation efforts to position our forces to ensure the ROK-U.S. Alliance deters conflict, and should deterrence fail and the Republic of Korea be attacked by north Korea, fight and win a war quickly and decisively. As you know, as we approach 54 years since the signing of the Armistice Agreement, the Republic of Korea Government desires to transition military command arrangements from our current Combined Forces Command, where wartime authority and responsibility is equally shared between the Republic of Korea and the United States, to a command structure where ROK forces are independently commanded by the ROK military during wartime, with United States forces in a supporting role.

The United States has agreed to this approach. It has been and remains my military assessment that we can execute this transition expeditiously in 2009, with no increased risk to Alliance deterrence or warfighting capabilities.

Again, and as a military matter, this transition of OPCON can be executed properly in 2009. U.S. Department of Defense leaders agree that this date is very achievable. As you know, Republic of Korea military and political leaders have proposed a delay in the requested OPCON transfer until the year 2012. I am sure that as cooperative allies and through close consultation, we will be able to determine a transition date satisfactory to both allies. We hope to reach an agreement on that by this summer.

I would like to address three key areas of U.S. Forces Korea transformation. The first involves enhancing the Alliance's readiness through the provision of advanced warfighting materiel and battle command systems. This ongoing effort will enhance Life of the Alliance capabilities, while ensuring that necessary bridging capabilities -- such as intelligence sharing, communications, and theater missile defense -- are in place to support future ROK independent military operational wartime command and control. I am confident that all the required Life of the Alliance and bridging capabilities necessary to support the transition of wartime OPCON will be fully in place in 2009.

The second area involves the continued shaping of roles and missions for both ROK and US forces, as we set conditions for ROK independent wartime command. Of particular interest to me is the United Nations Command. When the transition of independent wartime OPCON to the ROK military is executed, it will also be necessary to implement revisions to the roles and missions of the United Nations Command. This will be necessary because with the ROK military exercising independent command of its forces during Armistice, crisis escalation, and potential war, the U.N. Commander will have no command authority over any ROK forces. With the ROK military manning the Demilitarized Zone and the sea patrolling the Northern Limit Line, only the ROK military will have the command authority over forces in potential contact with the enemy.

It is clear to me that the future U.N. commander will still be the USFK Commander as is the case today, but he will likely assume a supporting role and relationship similar to the future supporting role between USFK and the ROK military. United Nations Command Sending States would still be asked to support deterrence and potential war in the same way as they are now. While the details of required United Nations Command revisions must yet be worked out, clearly the U.N. commander, with no ROK forces assigned, cannot be responsible for maintenance of the Armistice Agreement and potential crisis escalation.

The third area of USFK transformation involves realigning U.S. forces on the Peninsula, with the purpose of consolidating U.S. forces into fewer but more modern and less intrusive hubs. Our major effort is at Camp Humphreys. At Camp Humphreys we are consolidating U.S. Army forces and our future USFK Headquarters. This process is underway and we are making positive progress with nearly 600 million dollars currently invested in on-going construction.

In light of this, I must admit that I was surprised when I read recent press reports that a ROK government official stated the relocation of U.S. forces would not occur until 2013. This was news to me, and not at all reflective of the agreement we have with the Republic of Korea government to achieve this move by 2008.

Any further delay in our consolidation efforts at Camp Humphreys concerns me. Delays will unnecessarily subject USFK personnel and our families to more years of living and working in old, outdated, and, in many cases, dilapidated Korean War era facilities and housing. Furthermore, delays will slow down my efforts to increase the number of family accompanied tours for U.S. military personnel. Increasing the number of families accompanying U.S. Service members on tours in Korea is essential to enhancing our good neighbor and engagement programs with the Korean citizenry. I consider quick improvements in facilities, housing, and quality of life infrastructure for my personnel and my families long overdue and necessary now.

I do not want to see any further delays. It is simply not right. We have long promised our U.S. military personnel and their families an improved living and working environment and quality of life here in this great land, and we need to provide it for them quickly. They are dedicated and committed to this Alliance, and they are ready to fight and die to preserve peace here. They deserve high quality living and working conditions. We cannot fail them in pursuit of this. On behalf of my personnel and their families, I hope the press reports were wrong.

Let me make a few comments on readiness. To have a credible deterrent, we must maintain a high state of force readiness. A vital component in maintaining our readiness is our theater exercise program. One of these is Combined Forces Command's annual exercise named Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration; R-S-O-I. It will occur, as it has for years, this spring. No surprises. This scheduled exercise is not provocative in any way. It is conducted with the single purpose to achieve readiness levels that I deem necessary to ensure deterrence.

One of the requirements of this annual CFC exercise is to practice bringing U.S. reinforcing forces onto the peninsula. This year, as we have in the past, U.S. Army forces will draw a representative sample of their pre-positioned brigade combat equipment and exercise with it. While they will only draw a relatively small percentage of their pre-positioned brigade equipment, it will provide me with the confidence that I need to ensure all U.S. Army equipment is ready to fight tonight. I look forward to our RSOI exercise and see it as essential in maintaining Alliance readiness. This is a routine deterrence exercise, but routine does not mean that it is not important. It is important -- indeed vital -- to the readiness of Combined Forces Command.

I look forward to a bright, productive, cooperative, and peaceful 2007. Nonetheless, in U.S. Forces Korea we have a range of challenges which must be addressed.

These include returning additional vacated base camps and their buildings and facilities - free -- to the ROK Government in accordance with established Status of Forces Agreement provisions. I hope that this process will be conducted in a dignified and cooperative manner. Additionally, USFK faces a significant financial shortfall as a result of the Strategic [Special] Measures Agreement burden sharing allocation. During recent negotiations, USFK presented a minimum requirement of 832 billion won. This would have represented a 44 percent burden sharing contribution by the ROK government towards USFK non-personnel stationing costs. In the end, the ROK government offered the United States 725.5 billion won. I will have to resolve this more than 100 billion won shortfall for calendar year 2007. I have to pay real money for real bills. I will be more than 100 billion won short of funds necessary to pay the bills during the year 2007.

Next month I will lay out for our governments what cuts in USFK plans, programs and activities will be necessary to mitigate this shortfall. These cuts could be significant and will have to come from one or all of the three categories where we apply burden sharing money -- our Korean civilian labor force, our purchases of logistics supplies and services from Korean companies, or construction programs to upgrade or build new USFK facilities and family quality of life improvements south of Seoul at our base consolidation locations. Regardless of which approach I take, I cannot allow our U.S. force readiness to suffer, and I will not allow my family members to suffer due to these monetary shortfalls.

In conclusion, my assessment is that the Alliance is strong and vibrant. It will remain that way. The United States will remain a reliable and trusted ally as long as we are welcome and wanted in this great land. Our governments are postured to ensure future Alliance security mechanisms continue to achieve their stated purpose -- And, that purpose is to deter aggression, and should deterrence fail and north Korea attack the South, fight and win decisively and quickly. We are ready to do this now, and we will remain ready to do it in the future. I look forward to the year 2007. And I will be happy to take your questions.

REPORTER: Regarding the Roles and Missions of UNC, (paraphrased) Last year in July at the SPI meetings the USFK and DoD officials made a suggestion that they would like to also talk about Armistice management in relation to the OPCON transfer. As the UNC Commander what kind of relationships or armistice management areas do you think you would like to transfer or transition to the ROK armed forces, and will it include NNSC [Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission] management and budget. Do you have any suggestions or details?

GEN BELL: Thank you for your question. We're sitting down now in the post Security Consultative Meetings environment, where we had our meetings in Washington, to look at the range of issues that must be considered as a function of OPCON transfer...transition of OPCON. There are a wide range of issues that we must resolve. Not just the physical handing over or transferring responsibilities. We have to look at OPLANS, war plans. How do we manage war plans? How do we determine how to defend this nation? We have to look at the United Nations Command.

We have to do that because as we move from armistice -- frankly, we hope we never have to move from armistice to crisis, but if we were to move from armistice to crisis to even potential war, this process could happen within minutes. After all, the north Koreans are postured with long range artillery that can target this very building today. So all they'd have to do is pull the trigger, so there is not any guarantee of a long term consultative period from armistice through crisis escalation to the onset of war.

So whoever is in charge during armistice probably ought to be in charge during war so that there is a seamless unity of effort for military operations. So we are going to discuss this. The worst thing we can do is, within minutes, try to transfer command back and forth. This would create an exploitable seam for military commanders that would be unacceptable.

So, I don't have any answers yet, but I hope we can negotiate, discuss and come up with something that will work effectively to keep doing what we've always done. And that is deter aggression and ensure peace and stability remain a constant on this peninsula. That is what we want to do. And we want to do that with the assured knowledge that we are ready to defend this nation should it be attacked. And we're going to have to work with the United Nations to determine what revisions are necessary.

I think the bottom line for the first part is we cannot have an arrangement that in anyway adds risk to the effective deterrence that our alliance, the mutual security alliance, deems necessary to defend this great land. And I will not allow any additional risks to be accrued in any arrangements that we make because it would be foolish to do that.

Second, you talked about the Neutral Nations [Supervisory Commission]. I believe the Neutral Nations -- the ones I deal with most closely, of course, are Sweden and Switzerland, are a vital component to provide me and the north Koreans, for that matter and all interested parties, a conduit for reason and discussion during crisis. They have been very effective in this in crisis periods, including the last major crisis, the patrol boat engagement in the in the West Sea area.

And so whatever arrangements we make, I believe the Neutral Nations must still be part of the future. They are important to an international opportunity for common sense to prevail. They have been effective in the past and I feel they are important to the future. So, I don't know yet about the Neutral Nations but I want them to be around as long as the armistice agreement remains in place and there is no peace treaty. Once a peace treaty is signed then perhaps there is some other plan that can be taken.

And you mentioned budgets -- I'm not sure exactly what you meant by budgets, but we will fund the Neutral Nations in the way they need to be funded and all U.N. activities the way they need to be funded to ensure that they can accomplish their jobs.

So I think I'll leave that one at that.

REPORTER: Sir you mentioned the RSOI exercise with some concern. Have you some indication that exercise may be cancelled or not carried out in the usual way? And secondly, regarding the Yongsan Base Relocation, and the reports of a delay until 2013, what timetable is USFK working to? In other words when do you plan to relocate [your headquarters]?

GEN BELL: Let me talk about RSOI first. I read in the paper today and yesterday that there was great concern that some of my airplanes which are stationed in Guam are training here in Korea. I read these press reports coming out of Pyongyang. And of course, it is preposterous. You bet we train in Korea! That's why we have the Air Force. And yes, they are stationed in Korea, they are stationed in Guam, and they're stationed lots of places. So, I thought it would be appropriate to remind everybody of how important it is to be an effective deterrent, you have to be credible. And military operations don't happen on paper. They happen in complex environments, in difficult skies, in difficult oceans, and it's hard. And to get good at it you have to practice. If you don't practice, you increase risk. And when you increase risk, you begin to lose your ability to be a credible deterrent. So I'm just putting everyone on notice that the currently scheduled RSOI, which is a normal exercise, it is not much different than what we've done in the past is on schedule and on track. And I mean to execute it to standard to maintain readiness.

I have no indication at all – zero – that there is any opposition to this exercise by anybody. Although, I am certain that at some point, someone will raise their hand and ask, “Why are you doing this?”

I would just ask that they read the transcript of this press conference and they'd know why we're doing it. You can't be a military force unless you train. To train you have to exercise. If you do that you have an opportunity to be ready. That equals deterrence.

Now, I'll talk about base relocation. I am clearly emotional about this. When [I] walk into some of my families' living arrangements with ladies and young babies and. . . recognize that these Americans are serving thousands miles from home and they don't have their extended families; they don't have their normal lives. They want to be normal over here. They want to engage with the Korean people. They want to be normal people, and we've put them in poor facilities, and we turn our backs on them. That's not right. We hope that the Camp Humphrey improvements, and these are associated with the Yongsan relocation, and the Land Partnership Plan that moves, fundamentally, the 2nd Infantry Division down to Camp Humphreys, that this consolidation effort corrects a wrong that we have tolerated for years. That is, lousy living conditions and lousy facilities. So I am opposed to any decision to stretch this out for any reason, whether it be political, fiscal or money or whatever it is. I want to get it done so I can look in the eyes of these little children and these moms and say we're doing right by you.

We agreed back in 2004 to get this done by 2008. Now here we are entering into 2007 and we've started the process. If you go down to Camp Humphreys you'll see buildings going up and you'll see progress. The problem is that pretty quick in the future all of that is going to stop, or it could stop, because of fiscal constraints, money constraints, or political decisions. I will fight this because I don't want to leave my families or my Servicemembers in bad conditions. I want them to be normal.

Last point, I believe it is essential for US Forces Korea to be what I call an accompanied tour. I need to explain that because it's very important. Most, the majority, of US Servicemembers, over here serve, what we call, unaccompanied tours. Their families are not authorized to come with them. We don't allow it. So we've forced them to be separated from their spouses and their kids. I don't think that's right. Furthermore, I believe we have a lasting alliance, and one of the components of that should be USFK families engaging with Korean families, culturally, socially, together as one, sharing their lives together. I don't think we ought to have a soldier come over here and hide in the barracks for a year and then go back to the States. I think we ought to have a soldier and his or her family and their kids come over here, go to school with Koreans, play with Koreans, engage with Koreans, grow up with Koreans and learn each others' culture together. Camp Humphreys is one place that affords me the opportunity to expand facilities to increase the number of accompanied tours. The more increases we achieve in accompanied tours, the more normal we make this assignment, I believe, the more help we will give to the future of the alliance. And I am certain it will be a better deal for American Servicemembers and their families. So I am a big proponent of Camp Humphreys for all those reasons.

You asked when I will move the colors, my headquarters, down there. I don't know. I've got to have a decent headquarters that functions. It's not there yet. And I'm working on plans to get it built as soon as possible. But I don't have a date for you so I can't answer that question today. All I do know is I can't go down there right now and find a chair to say that's where I'm commanding from. It doesn't make sense. So we'll have to keep working that.

REPORTER: You mentioned the delay of the date of the Yongsan movement to Camp Humphreys and, of course, you said you did not want that to happen. However, realistically, if it is inevitable to delay the movement from Yongsan, what do you think will happen? Do you think it will affect the OPCON transfer issue?

GEN BELL: Thank you for your question. I'm not going to make conjectures about delays. We have an agreement. It's between two nations and I hope it's executed and I expect it to be executed. Let's talk about any link between the Camp Humphreys move and OPCON. There's no link. They're not related. There is one piece that has to be reconciled and that is when we decide to transfer OPCON, depending upon that date, whatever it is, it might not make sense to move CFC to Camp Humphreys only to undo it a year later or something.

So we'll have to look at the date selected and make a decision about whether we transfer OPCON here before we move to Camp Humphreys, which can be done, we transfer OPCON at the same time we move to Camp Humphreys, which can be done, or we transfer OPCON after we move to Camp Humphreys, but we'd have to think about that so it wouldn't be inefficient. But with all of our technology, and with all of our ability to communicate, there is no linkage between having USFK here or USFK at Camp Humphreys, in my opinion. We can sort those out and we ought not tie them together because they're not tied together. I need Camp Humphrey's built and I need my families in good conditions and I want them out engaging in this great culture and this great society. Americans have a lot to learn about the world and this is the best place I know to learn. And I want my families over here learning about this great culture. The quicker I get Humphreys built the way I want it; the more of my families I can ask to come over here and join their Servicemembers.

REPORTER: Will the shortfalls in SMA funds you talked about earlier affect your efforts to bring up to date or modernize the facilities that were talked about last year?

GEN BELL: Let me talk about SMA burden sharing. These burden sharing monies are spent in three categories for US, non-personnel station costs and I mentioned these briefly in my remarks. They are used, first, to pay for our local national Korea employees; the salaries of Korea citizens who work for US Forces Korea come from these funds. Second, logistics sustainment for our forces, we buy products and services with SMA money. Last but not least, and really vital right now, we use these monies to build stuff. I don't want to get too technical, but the Yongsan Relocation part of building stuff is not part of SMA. But the Land Partnership Program, which is everything else, is part of SMA. It's all the stuff in the 2nd Infantry Division area that's supposed to move; I can use SMA burden sharing funds to build their stuff. Not only can I, but I'm expected to. Those who suggest that burden sharing money is associated with troop strength are wrong. It's not. It could be if we were not in this transformation process. But while we're trying to build things, SMA requirements are a function of our building program. The two nations agreed to build stuff and companies want money to build the stuff.

From the American perspective, for our family housing, which I'm trying to build, my government expects us to use a process called Build-To-Lease wherein a Korean entrepreneur would build a family housing set of quarters and the United States government would guarantee a lease for a long time to ensure he or she gets their money back on their investment. That's about half of our costs. For the other half I have to use burden sharing money. If I don't have burden sharing money, I've got to make a choice. It's just plain and simple. I have to choose whether to lay off Korean civilian employees, which is extremely problematic because they contribute to my readiness. Or, I have to decide to cut back on my logistics or sustainment - again another no-go because that affects my readiness. So I'm kind of driven into a corner where the only thing I can back away from is my building program. But I don't want to do that because it just stretches out the building process. So I'm being put into a bad position, from a policy perspective, of not having the money to do what our two governments told me to do.

So I'm complaining about that. I need the money from the two governments to execute what they told us to do. And I want to do it expeditiously in the time frame that the two nations agreed to – 2008. I'm finding it very difficult to do that. I'm not suffering; my families and my Servicemembers are the ones who will pay that price because they're going to continue to live and work in sub-standard facilities and I don't want them to do that.

REPORTER: Another question is regarding a report from Washington about nuclear activities on the part of north Korea and possible plans to test a second nuclear device. Do you have any information or intelligence on this matter that you can share with us?

GEN BELL: I won't share with you any intelligence I have about anything and you know that. I did read the same reports you read that make conjecture about whether the north Koreans were preparing to conduct another nuclear test or not. Before Christmas I had a press opportunity here at USFK and I said then that if it's in the interests of the north Koreans, if they choose to do this, I believe they have the capability to test another weapon. They've self-proclaimed that they have nuclear weapons, and that's plural. They have tested one and, therefore, there's no reason to believe that at sometime in the future, when it serves their purposes, that they won't test another one. So, I suspect, someday they will. Having said that, the alliance is fully capable of deterring north Korean aggression and, should north Korea attack the south in any way, the Combined Forces Command will respond and we will win quickly and we will win decisively. It's just that simple. These are not hollow words. That is a fact.

REPORTER: I think we need to go through the Camp Humphreys issue again (paraphrased). USFK believes it is physically possible to complete construction and move to Camp Humphreys by the end of the year 2008. However, the Korean government feels it is physically difficult to complete construction that early and is leaning towards late 2009 or 2010 and 2013 when including the 2ID. Do you think it is physically possible to complete all construction and move down to Camp Humphreys in 2008? Does USFK have other views or options that there may be a possibility to delay this process?

GEN BELL: Building stuff is a function of two things. It takes money and time to put brick and mortar in place. If you mess with either one of those, it'll take longer. What I'm looking for is a commitment to do this as expeditiously as possible. I realize there have been many complex issues surrounding the Camp Humphrey's move. Politically, there have been protestors, some wonderful Koreans have been displaced, and I regret that. But this is an agreement between two governments. And now that we've made the agreement, and now that the citizens have been displaced and now that the land has been prepared or is being prepared, I think that it would serve both nations well to allocate the money necessary to do this as quickly as our construction companies can do it. I think that if we stretch it out because of money it won't serve our purposes. So it's not only about the physics of building with brick and mortar.

The physics do take some time but it's also about commitment, frankly by both countries, to get this done. And if they don't commit to an aggressive building program it will take decades. In the mean time, the quality of life for the military members and their families here will continue to degrade. Don't forget, as I'm looking at Camp Humphreys, nobody will let me spend any money on the old facilities because they see that as a waste. So I'm caught in a soft seam here. I'm caught. I can't fix up the old places and I can't build the new places. That's not fair. So I think we ought to build the new places. We're great allies. We have a great alliance. We're going to sit down and figure this out. We're not going to debate this in the press. We're going to find a way to go ahead and we will. We will sit down through the correct processes, both our Status of Forces Agreement process and our political processes where necessary, like Strategic [Security] Policy Initiative meetings, and iron this thing out and figure out where we are. I hope we will be able to do this sooner than later. I can't offer you anything else today because I don't have any other facts right now. All I know is what I read in the newspaper a couple of weeks ago.

Thank you all for coming today. More importantly, thank you all for what you do. The press in a democracy, free, open, fair press, is the thing that keeps democracies vibrant. It's probably the only thing that keeps democracies vibrant. So what you do, in your livelihoods, is vital to the health of not only the Republic of Korea, but also to the United States and all democracies worldwide. So you're doing an important job and providing an important service. Thank you.

Gam Sa Ham Ni Da